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ASTLEY PASTON COOPER / ASHHURST

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FROM Colonial days Philadelphia has contributed more than its share to the progress of medicine. Soon after the middle of the eighteenth century a group of young Americans returned from Edinburgh imbued with the spirit of that school. It was not long before Morgan and Shippen started the first medical school in Philadelphia, and were soon joined by Kuhn and Rush. Since that time there has been a steady stream of men whose writings and teachings have spread throughout the land the results of their own searchings after truth. Bond and Barton, Wistar and Physick, the Hares and Woods, the Hodges and Penroses, Agnew and Leidy, the Peppers and Ashhursts.

Astley Ashhurst early appreciated the responsibilities he had inherited from his father, John Ashhurst, Jr., professor of surgery at the school Morgan had started. His devotion to this profession and its ideals was the dominating influence in his whole life. Except for his war service, his entire career was spent in Philadelphia. He was born there August 21, 1876, his mother being Sarah Stokes Wayne Ashhurst. He prepared at the Forsyth School, now the Episcopal Academy, a private college preparatory school located in Philadelphia, and entered the University of Pennsylvania from there, receiving his degree of Bachelor of Arts in 1896 and his Doctor of Medicine in 1900. His classmates always remembered him as taking prizes in Latin and Greek and in taking senior honors in the Academic Department, and he was elected to membership in the Philomathean Society, the Phi Beta Kappa and the Sigma Xi fraternities, and graduated the first man in the senior class of the medical school.

After leaving the medical school he served an interneship from 1900 to 1901 at the Children's Hospital, and from 1901 to 1904 at the Episcopal Hospital. Following his interneships he served an apprenticeship in the dispensaries of the Episcopal, Orthopedic, Children's, German (now Lankenau), and the Pennsylvania Hospitals until 1913, when he was elected surgeon to the Orthopedic Department and associate surgeon to the Surgical Department of the Episcopal Hospital. In 1914 he was appointed surgeon to the Orthopedic Hospital and in 1915 he was promoted to the position of surgeon at the Episcopal Hospital. His training as prosector to Dr. G. G. Davis, professor of applied anatomy at the Medical School of the University of Pennsylvania, gave him a knowledge of

surgical anatomy which not only influenced his operative work, but hallmarked all his contributions to surgical literature. For 19 years, 1911 to 1930, he was an instructor in surgery at the University of Pennsylvania teaching operative surgery on the cadaver. From 1930 until his resignation in May, 1932, he was professor of clinical surgery at his Alma Mater.

From the establishment of teaching in the University's Graduate School of Medicine, in 1918, Dr. Ashhurst evinced great interest in the ideas and work of the School. In 1920 he became an associate in surgery in the School, in 1921 an associate professor of surgery, and in 1923 a professor of clinical surgery. The latter post he retained until his death, in 1932—although inactive from illness toward the end. His teaching of clinical surgery, to the graduate students of surgery, especially in the Episcopal Hospital of Philadelphia, exemplified those qualities of conscientiousness, erudition, and technical perfection which were his admirable characteristics.

His wide knowledge of surgical literature and his mastery of the fundamentals of surgery, together with his interest in teaching, made his lectures and quizzes popular with the students. The student's first impression of him was usually unfavorable. His hesitating speech, which was the result of stuttering in early manhood, together with his hypercritical respect for the truth were causes of his being at first misunderstood, but his sterling character and the justice of his criticism, not only of others but of himself, were soon appreciated by the students, and explains his popularity with them.

"As a surgeon he was methodical in the superlative degree," says Dr. Crossan, one of his associates, "and insisted upon performing every detail of the operation himself, including the application of the bandages. Neither brilliancy nor speed in operating was attempted by him and he seemed to abhor the spectacular. He was just as meticulous of the pre-operative and postoperative care of his patients as in his operative technique, and he would never accept the opinion of any one without himself consulting the evidence, making his own physical examination, examining the X-ray films and studying the gross microscopical preparation of the tissues."

He was proud of being a general surgeon and with such wide and varied training as he had received he was well fitted for such a broad field. Though tempted, after the death of Dr. G. G. Davis, to limit himself to orthopedic surgery, for which he had such an unusual training, he said that surgery of the bones and joints belonged to the general surgeon and that such a special field was too small to occupy the full time of a well trained surgeon. He was trained also in gynecology. For several years he did the neurosurgery at the Orthopedic Hospital.

Outside of Philadelphia, as one would expect, he was probably best known as an author. His scientific articles were not only clear and simple but uniformly accurate, and all of his contributions to surgical literature reflect his scholarly





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attainments. As one would expect from his clinical work, he never accepted the statements of others in literature, but always ran them down to their source and frequently embarrassed his colleagues by his discovery of inaccuracies. One wonders where he found time for all this work, for between the years 1902 and 1920 he wrote 82 magazine articles, was co-author in 10 others, wrote numerous book reviews, edited 2 volumes of the Episcopal Hospital Reports, was a co-author of 2 textbooks (*Enlargement of the Prostate*, with Dr. John B. Deaver, and *Surgery of the Upper Abdomen*, with Dr. John B. Deaver) and published the first edition of his book *Surgery; Principles and Practice*, and the "Gross Prize" essay "An Anatomical and Surgical Study of Fractures of the Lower End of the Humerus."

He was a very active member of the Philadelphia Academy of Surgery and was rarely absent from its meetings. His presence was not passive in any sense, but always active up to the time of his illness. This activity consisted not only in his own presentations, but in a critical discussion of nearly every paper. He felt it the duty of every Fellow to prepare a discussion of the subjects presented at the meeting. His knowledge of the literature and careful preparation of his discussions stirred his fellow members to efforts usually beyond their inclinations. They all knew that he would be at the meeting and that he would make as great if not greater preparations for his discussion than they had in their presentation. His value to the Philadelphia Academy of Surgery cannot be overestimated. He delivered the annual address in 1910 and served as president in 1928 and 1929, and received the Samuel D. Gross Prize in 1910 for "An Anatomical Study of Fractures of the Lower End of the Humerus."

He was vitally interested in the College of Physicians and could be found in the building at some time during each day reviewing literature or discharging his duties as honorary librarian, a position he held from January 9, 1928, to the time of his death.

He was elected a Fellow of the American Surgical Association in 1913, and he brought to that association the same unique qualities which he exhibited in the Philadelphia Academy of Surgery. Astley P. C. Ashhurst could not be other than Astley P. C. Ashhurst—whether it was in Philadelphia, in the American Surgical Association, the Interurban Surgical Society, the Society of Clinical Surgery, the Society of Military Surgeons, the International Society of Surgeons, Association de Française de Chirurgie, the Academy of Natural Sciences, or the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, he was the same sterling scholarly character in search of medical truth.

His sense of duty and his belief in the obligation of service sent him to the first Officers' Training Camp organized at Plattsburg, in 1916. With America's entry into the World War he organized the Episcopal Hospital Base Unit 34 and was its first medical director. He was sent to France with this Unit December 15, 1917, and returned to America in 1919. In France he served at the front with

the French and the Americans, and after the Armistice was appointed as a consultant to the Hospital Center at Savenay. Upon returning home he was appointed chief of the surgical service at the Walter Reed Hospital, where he served until the time of his discharge from the Army, April 16, 1919. He entered the Army as a first lieutenant and was discharged as a colonel. He received a citation for "exceptionally meritorious and conspicuous service with Base Hospital 34."

"As a man he was almost a crusader for honesty and truth." With Ashhurst there was not such thing as a white lie or a gray lie. Truth permitted of no comparison and it was either a truth or a falsehood. Few of us have not winced at his criticisms and book reviews, which were rarely sought by writers or publishers because he insisted on recording what he believed to be true. His probity won him great respect even though it did not make him popular. His was a life devoted to surgery. He had no hobbies and his relaxation was study. Eventually the long hours of clinical work and study began to show their effects. In 1929, at the early age of 52, he began to suffer from dizzy spells and in the latter part of May, 1930, while driving his car on the Roosevelt Boulevard he had his first attack of cerebral thrombosis and crashed into a tree. He was able, however, after getting out of the wreck, to take a picture of it and make his way to his office by trolley and bus. Several hours after he reached home it was noticed that he had a left hemiplegia. After months of rest he entirely recovered the use of his hand and leg and gradually returned to operating and teaching. However, in the latter part of August, 1932, he had a second attack of thrombosis, from which he rallied, but a third attack on September 16, 1932, resulted in his death 3 days later. To those who knew him intimately he never made the slightest complaint or lament of his misfortune. When asked if he did not know that he was carrying high blood pressure, he replied, "Yes, but what is there to do about it?"

On July 16, 1930, he married Anna Campbell, during his remaining days his constant companion and devoted attendant. His wife and daughter survive him.

Ashhurst was not an ordinary man. He was rather tall but stooped shouldered, strong but gentle, never hurried but constantly active, apparently slow but accomplishing much, seemingly a crabbed bachelor but with a warm heart and understanding sympathy, a caustic but fair critic, dogmatic but open minded, not widely popular but much beloved, a diligent student all his days and a teacher of sound surgery. For over 30 years he met his inherited responsibilities and carried on the Philadelphia tradition. He contributed much and will be sorely missed by his patients, his students, and his friends.